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## Discovery of the nest of Humblot's Flycatcher *Humblotia flavirostris*

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Humblot's Flycatcher forms a monotypic genus, probably close to *Muscicapa* (Benson 1960). The species is confined to a few thousand hectares of mountain forest on the slopes of the Karthala volcano (Louette 1988), which dominates the southern half of Grand Comoro island. Although confiding and rather common, nothing is known as yet about the species' breeding habits, despite the breeding grounds having been

well explored on some occasions (1965, 1983, 1985) during the presumed breeding period (October–November). Benson (1960) speculated that the finding of a nest would be of particular interest in establishing the affinities of this peculiar bird.

On 12 November 1989, when carrying out point-transect counts in the Karthala forest just north of M'Lima Manda (1050 m a.s.l.) on behalf of an ICBP bird inventory project, M.H. observed a pair of *Humblotia* with food. It turned out that he was standing right under an active nest. The surrounding habitat was a low, rather open type of pioneer woodland on the southern of the two lava flows to the north of M'Lima Mani. The canopy height was only about 12–15 m, and the nest was situated in the mid stratum. The nesting tree had a stem of about 15 cm diameter, was about 8 m high and had a crown with rather dense, stiff, leathery foliage. The nest was in the upper branches, and hidden among the foliage. At least two young were begging. Food items brought to the nest were seen at close range on five occasions. Four of these were single, large centipedes (*Chilopoda*), and in the remaining case the bird carried two items, one of which was long-legged and presumably a mantis or large spider.

The spot was revisited on 17 December in order to collect the nest. No droppings or feather sheaths remained in it, making it questionable that the young fledged successfully. The nest was an untidy cup or bowl of mosses, lined on the inside with dry grasses, simply resting on (not attached to) some smaller branches of the tree-top (not a fork). The internal diameter of the cup was 5.5 cm and its depth 4 cm. Externally the nest was 7 cm deep, and its base was 15 cm long and 12 cm wide. It was collected and is now stored in the KMMA Museum, Tervuren, Belgium (nr. 90-01-A-1).

Is there information for the evaluation of the affinities of *Humblotia* in the position of the nest, its simple shape or its constituent materials? These features are rather diverse in African *Muscicapa* (Erard 1990), but among the species studied in Gabon, in its site and construction the nest of *Humblotia* comes close to that described for *Muscicapa sethsmithi*, also a forest species. Based on information on the nest alone, there is apparently no strong reason for sustaining the genus *Humblotia* apart from *Muscicapa*.

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